WASHINGTON. D.C. – House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Ranking Member Darrell Issa (R-CA) sent a letter today to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar regarding "two significant decisions announced by the President and your Department not only conflict with this statement, but cast serious doubt upon the federal government's commitment to contain the leak which is directly affecting the people of the Gulf." According to Louisiana's Placquemines Parish President Billy Nungesser, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ordered him to cease dredging off the Chandelier Islands by 6:00 p.m. on June 22, 2010.

"As described by Mr. Nungesser, the Department's order – which appears to be rooted in mere supposition – directs the Parish to move dredging two additional miles offshore," Issa wrote. "Mr. Nungesser maintains that modifying his dredging operation will take seven days to complete. While the Parish's current efforts are suspended, pending relocation to a new site, oil will continue to flow unimpeded into marshland and natural habitats. If, as Ms. Lyder indicates, the Department requires dredgers to backfill what they have already removed before continuing operations, it could be weeks before vital progress is made. After 65 days and over 90,000,000 gallons of leaked oil, such nonsensical bureaucratic delay cannot be tolerated."

The dredging operation on the eastern portion of the islands, which provides more than 50,000 cubic yards of material per day, is critical to forming sand berms along the Gulf coast. These structures, permitted by the Army Corps of Engineers, provide a necessary layer of defense against oil slicks, hurricanes, and tropical storms. Without them, the Parish and its industry will suffer far more devastation than Hurricane Katrina caused in 2005. According to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Deputy Assistant Secretary Jane Lyder during a teleconference with Committee staff on June 23, 2010, the Department believes the dredging will accelerate erosion. In turn, the viability of the islands will be at risk over the long term. However, according to Ms. Lyder, there is no scientific modeling that suggests such an impact, or over what period of time. "We just know that it's harmful." The apparent lack of scientific evidence behind this decision is breathtaking.

"My second concern relates to your decision to appeal the recent federal court order blocking the imposition of a six-month moratorium on drilling, and your announced intention to impose a new ban," Issa wrote. "Despite the court's decision and the advice of experts, it appears that you are engaging in a new effort to reinstate the moratorium that still may not have scientific backing. It is my understanding these same experts personally expressed in a meeting with you on June 21, 2010, their concern that the moratorium will actually increase the risk associated with deepwater drilling once a six-month ban is lifted. According to Ken Arnold, an engineer who your agency consulted on the report and was present at the June 21 meeting, these concerns were presented to you in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. Your efforts to pursue a moratorium that is not supported by the scientific community and Gulf residents is unconscionable."

Issa requested that the Secretary provide the Committee with the following information:

1. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation delivered by members of the National Academy of Engineering on June 21, 2010;

2. All documents and communications referring or relating to the development of recommendations contained in the "Increased Safety Measures for Energy Development on the Outer Continental Shelf," including, but not limited to, documents relating to the six-month moratorium on drilling;

3. All documents and communications referring or relating to the decision ordering Louisiana's Placquemines Parish President Billy Nungesser to cease dredging operations on June 22, 2010; and

4. All documents referring or relating to the Administration's decision to appeal the injunction granted by Judge Feldman on June 22, 2010.

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